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# HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA.

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LOS ANGELES, 1895.

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## PRESIDENT'S INAUGURAL ADDRESS.

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BY E. BAXTER.

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[Delivered, January 7, 1895.]

*Fellow Members of the Historical Society of Southern California—*

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN:

It is incumbent upon your president to present to you some suggestions, on assuming the duties of his office.

What I shall say to-night may not be different in its material features from what has been presented by my predecessors—only common place—neither original nor new.

Our constitution declares the objects of this society to be: "The collection and preservation of all material which can have any bearing upon the history of the Pacific coast in general and of Southern California in particular; the discussion of historical, literary or scientific subjects, and the reading of papers thereon; and the trial of such scientific experiments as shall be determined by the society."

The word "history" is said to be derived from a Latin word signifying a matter of record; or Greek words signifying knowing, learned; and, to inquire, explore, or learn by inspection or inquiry. History, therefore, includes, or treats of, almost everything we know, see, do or suffer, present as well as past.

Since our organization other societies have come into existence in this city, and in Southern California, among which might be mentioned the Scien-

tific Society, which, its name would indicate to be devoted more exclusively to the study and discussion of scientific subjects, and embracing questions not historical, aside from the facts it seeks to establish, the existence of which, when settled, properly becomes a matter of history. Among others also might be mentioned the Friday Morning Club—more exclusively for women.

These other societies deal mostly with subjects not necessarily pertinent to the line of our investigations, and which we may well leave out of our plans, recognizing the sister societies as co-ordinate with ours, each having its own sphere and its own special work. But in so far as it is necessary to investigate the origin, formation or history of rocks, ores, shells, fishes, reptiles, beasts and birds, and even of man himself in many cases, from relics and fragmentary remains, by scientific knowledge, which points to certain eras in the world's existence, and again, by reflection, determine the eras by their present condition and sometimes by petrified particles, we cannot wholly separate history from science.

Some of our newer citizens, recently arrived on this coast, who naturally wish to join and take part with us, are persons who have been interested in the history of other parts of our country, east of the great "divide," and in scientifico-historical subjects there. Their minds have been actively trained on the very lines which will render them our most valuable members. These cannot write or speak with personal knowledge of the history, either animate or inanimate, of Southern California or of the Pacific coast. But they can give us instructive and exceedingly interesting essays or historical papers, regarding or concerning the localities where they have lived, and, in fact upon subjects affecting the whole country, which will tend to throw light on the history of this coast, or of its aborigines or earlier occupants; as, for instance, many of the eastern Indian tribes, their habits, occupations, tombs, etc., which will serve to show their relation or otherwise to those of this coast and locality.

For the benefit of any such, who have doubted their ability to assist us, and doubt their being able to derive any benefit from membership in our society, I deem it not amiss to say here, that we have always warmly welcomed and highly appreciated all well considered papers of that nature, though they only indirectly, or by comparison, affect the history of California. In fact, most of us are comparatively new residents, who came from localities distant from each other and from this coast. New comers, too, are inclined to seek old residents and ask questions. Information thus obtained is frequently new to older settlers.

It is neither necessary nor practicable that this society or its members or contributors confine their efforts to the discovery or record of events or facts, one hundred, fifty, thirty, twenty, or even five years in the past. True, we have members who know something of the more an-

cient history of our State, and this part of the State, by personal acquaintance with the former occupants who have gone from earth. Many more are not members who have retentive memories of the earlier times. The acquaintance of such should be cultivated and their store-houses unlocked whenever we can find them, that the more important facts may be recorded and given to the world.

It is well to record and preserve the record of the more recent events as they occur, or as soon after as they can be impartially weighed. The last two years have been eventful. A great financial panic has swept over the land. We should endeavor to put in brief, compact and concise form, its effect upon this coast and especially Southern California. The record of it in periodicals is smothered in chaff; we want only the wheat. This crisis has been followed by a year of almost unparalleled depression, stagnation of business and enforced idleness of thousands of people. Men have congregated in what seemed to be armies, and marched across the country to and fro. Traffic and travel and labor have been suspended by edicts from secret orders; and lawlessness has supervened in such proportions, as to call out the military arm of the government. It is well known that the reports that went abroad and were published in the East, of the part that California and Californians, and Southern Californians enacted, were fearfully distorted, and even now have not been corrected.

So, also, locally we have the strange anomaly that, during the very "hardest" times, when thousands are on the verge, and many actually over the verge into the vortex of financial ruin, we have an era of building of costly and commodious blocks, business houses, and even of dwellings, that is phenomenal.

Some of us should crystalize these facts, briefly but not dryly.

The first impressions of new-comers, notes of things most noticeable, of what is, or was when they first came, written down and presented here, in future years, and even now, if read abroad as endorsed by this society, would be both interesting and valuable history. Such papers are sure to call attention to the distinctive features of Southern California. They would be the records of events, practically written on the spot. What *is* now, will be history of the past, next year.

Doubtless most of us are usually impressed with the idea that our own experiences are all or nearly all, commonplace. But I apprehend there are few, if any, who do not regret that they did not put in writing and preserve the record of many events and facts known to them a score or more years ago, that then seemed trivial, but now seem very important. We all know that not all the history of a period, and seldom all the facts concerning a single event, can be written by a single individual, even though an eye-wit-

ness. Our society suggests perpetuity, and perpetuity is only obtained by continued activity. We are all engaged in other pursuits than writing or discovering history. Therefore each can only bring a fragment.

I made mention of the Scientific Society and others co-ordinate with ours. A suggestion has been made that an association of all the Historical, Scientific and Literary societies existing here be formed for mutual benefit. The several societies might thus, both help and relieve one another. I commend this suggestion to your attention.

There is one matter of business to which I will call attention. It is an evil which affects all volunteer societies. The entrance fee to this society is two dollars; the annual dues are three dollars, payable quarterly. This has been, so far, our only source of revenue. We are not only an association, but a corporation, of which every member is a part; and by signing the roll of members, every member pledges himself or herself to aid the rest, to bear a proportionate share of the burden and expense of the Society, at least to the extent of the annual dues, while the Society as a whole promises to each a share of the benefits. By signing the roll, a member assumes an obligation to pay his dues as fully as if he signed his promissory note for the amounts as they become due. But in looking over the list of members on the Treasurer's books, I find the names of more than forty members who, within nine or ten years—mostly since 1890—have been marked, "dropped for non-payment of dues." Some have never paid any dues, and none are thus marked who are not two years or more in arrears, except those who have refused—not simply neglected—to pay dues. The aggregate of dues thus lost to the Society is over five hundred dollars. This does not include those who have died or moved away before they were "dropped." And all these "dropped" might be restored on paying arrearages. The list includes perhaps a score of occupations, professions, etc., mechanics, physicians, teachers, professors, merchants, literary men, lawyers, and even judges, and some more or less prominent members of religious societies. The sums are usually so small that it would be expensive to collect them by suit. Some are "outlawed," and many of these non-paying members have no property; while others are well-to-do. Our Treasurer has no salary, and much time would be required to collect, of those who are collectable, by persistent dunning. I simply lay the matter before you.

This Society is the owner of no abiding place and is not even able to pay rent for a room. The City permits us to hold our meetings in a court room and the County allows us to keep our valuables in the court house; but in each case we are tenants by sufferance. We should continually keep in view our need of a permanent home. We need all the money equitably due us, and if possible should devise some means to collect dues of those on our rolls. The Treasurer's report shows no surplus of money after paying for the annual publication. But there are many dues that will doubtless yet be voluntarily paid.

It is earnestly hoped that a greater interest may be awakened among those able to assist us, as well as our present membership, which should be continually increased; and that the Society may early be placed on a more solid and permanent basis.